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ABSTRACT

The learning and development experiences of English-speaking Caribbean immigrant women in the United States were examined in a transcultural study. A heuristic phenomenological approach was used to explore how a sample of 15 Anglophone women from the British Caribbean islands who had immigrated to the midwestern, southwestern, and eastern United States were negotiating the structures that facilitate and/or hinder their development. The interviews with the women revealed that early learning and socialization created a disciplined structure and solid foundation that facilitate adult learning and development in their host country. The women acquired two forms of knowledge--indigenous knowledge and institutional knowledge--in their home country. To participate in cultural systems in the United States, the women had to renegotiate their identity, language, and conceptualization of voice. The women navigated the epistemological positions of women's ways of knowing and were not fixed in any one particular developmental phase. The findings suggested that the epistemological positions of Silent Knower, Received Knower, Subjective Knower, Procedural Knower, and Constructed Knower are not stages of epistemological development but different positions that a woman occupies as she interacts with the various systems within her sociocultural environment. The women's learning and epistemological development was driven by context, personal agency, and social capital. (11 references) (MN)

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Mary V. Alfred

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Women's Learning and Development Across Borders:
Insights from Anglophone Caribbean Immigrant Women in the United States

Mary V. Alfred
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Abstract: This study examined the learning and development experiences of English-speaking Caribbean immigrant women from a cross-cultural context. Using Belenky's model of women's ways of knowing, the study found that self-agency, culture, social capital, and the sociocultural environment influence the epistemological position that a woman occupies. The study also found that women move freely among these positions, depending on the context of the experience.

Since the abolition of slavery on West Indian sugar plantations, West Indians have viewed migration as a means of personal and economic development. Consequently, since the United States opened its doors to the third world countries in the early nineteenth century, British West Indians have viewed it as a country where opportunities are abound and where dreams of economic stability can be realized. Noting the significance of migration in Caribbean life, Kasinitz, (1992) writes, "Few societies on earth have been as shaped by the movement of their people as those of the Caribbean. . . . In much of the Anglophone Caribbean, migration has become a normal and expected part of the adult life cycle, a virtual rite of passage" (p. 19). Despite the significance of migration in the Anglophone Caribbean's adult development, little has been articulated about that group's learning and development, particularly from a transcultural context.

Traditional studies on immigration have particularly focused on White European immigrants and have neglected to include the experiences of those of color (Kasinitz, 1992). In more recent immigration studies, however, we are beginning to see an increased emphasis on issues of diversity and the structural, contextual, and ethnic group factors that influence the transitional experiences of immigrants in the United States. Despite the diversity of contextual factors in newer immigration studies, little consideration has been given to the context of gender or the process of learning and development among immigrant adults in the host country. For example, Grasmuck and Grosfoguel (1997) note that women have dominated legal immigration during the last half of the twentieth century, yet there is a persistent tendency to portray and theorize immigrant behavior and experiences from male migrants' experience. It is important to emphasize that the experiences of female immigrants do not always mirror that of their male counterparts, and that newer studies are needed that would explore the experiences of female immigrants within the host cultural contexts.

Purpose of Study and Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study was to investigate, analyze, and describe women's development from a transcultural context. The study explored the learning and development experiences of Anglophone Caribbean immigrant women to gain insights into how they negotiate the structures that facilitate and/or hinder their development. The conceptual framework that informed this study was pulled from the literature base on women's learning and development (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Miller, 1991).

Jean Baker Miller, one of the early pioneers in the study of women's psychology, has questioned traditional psychological models that present self-development from a male perspective, that is, as a process of individuation rather than as a process of interconnectedness and relationship building. Instead, Miller (1991) presents women's development as "agency within community." She argues that women develop a sense of self in relationship with other selves and that they are active agents who use available resources in the construction and development of self. The emphasis here is on the context of relationship in adult development.

Carol Gilligan's work also points to the lack of women's experiences in developmental models. As Gilligan (1982), suggests, women's development and reasoning is not immature or deficient but reflects an alternative path and way of constructing their lived reality. She argues that women's lives are closely characterized by social interactions and personal relationships, and found attachment to be vital to women's development. Gilligan (1982) also examines the importance of voice in women's development. She theorizes

that voice is natural as well as cultural and is a powerful psychological instrument and a channel used to connect the inner world and the outer world. She further notes, "What a person says and does not say, and how she says it tells much about an individual and how she views herself in relation to others" (1982, p. 2). The meaning of voice, therefore, must be examined in studies of women's development.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) provide another view of women's development. From their interviews with women from various socio-economic and educational backgrounds, they identified five ways of knowing or epistemology common to women. They classify women as Silent Knowers, Received Knowers, Subjective Knowers, Procedural Knowers, and Constructed Knowers. What is not clear in the work of Belenky and her associates is the extent to which these perspectives are prescribed as stage models of women's epistemological development or different perspectives within which women navigate.

Hayes, Flannery, and associates (2000) examine the concept of learning among women, but do so from a gendered perspective. Their book, Women as Learners, explores the various ways in which women learn and the various contexts that influence learning. While the editors and contributors must be applauded in their efforts to theorize and document the experiences of women as learners in various contexts, little attention was given to the context of race, ethnicity, and culture in women's learning. This observation supports the critical claim that research on women's learning continues to center on issues important to the lives of White, middle class women. If women of color are mentioned, it is done from the perspective of gender. One reason for the paucity of research among women of color, according to Hayes (2000), is that the researchers involved in the study of women's learning are all White women. Since White middle class women are the primary researchers involved in women's learning, it is reasonable to assume that their critical position will be from a gendered perspective. Therefore, it is up to the female scholars of color to hail the banners or their own experiences.

Research Design

This qualitative study used a heuristic phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1990) to explore how Anglophone Caribbean immigrant women learn and develop in a cross-cultural context. In heuristic inquiry, the focus is exclusively aimed at understanding the lived experience and allows the researcher to also occupy a position of participant in the research process (Van Manen, 1990). I, therefore, served the dual role of participant and researcher. The following questions guided the research: (1) How does early socialization in the country of origin affect learning and development in the host country? (2) What sociocultural factors promote or hinder the learning and development of immigrant women in the host country? (3) To what extent does the development model, articulated in Women's Ways of Knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, (1986) mirrors the development experiences of Anglophone Caribbean immigrant women? This presentation will focus primarily on this last research question.

The study used a sample of 15 participants from the British Caribbean islands who were residing in the Midwestern, the Southwestern, and the Eastern United States. Interviewing was the primary means of data collection, and the transcribed data were analyzed in three ways. First a case narrative was conducted from each woman's story. Second, each significant experience was situated within the host or receiving country and further situated within the context of family, community, institution, or society. Finally, I concluded with a cross-case analysis to uncover the common themes in participants' cross-cultural learning and development experiences.

Summary of Findings

The study revealed that early learning and socialization created a disciplined structure and a solid foundation that facilitate adult learning and development in the host country. Participants acquired two forms of knowledge in the home country--indigenous knowledge and institutional knowledge. Indigenous learning consists of the informal learning that takes place within family and community and is in direct response to life's struggles and challenges. Through those informal learning experiences, participants learned to be creative, interdependent, and to become constructors of knowledge. Institutional knowledge, on the other hand, consists of learning that takes place in formal academic structures. The learning that took place in formal structures was teacher driven and emphasized an objective pedagogy. The participants learned that knowledge came from experts and were socialized to depend on the teacher for knowledge. Therefore, students came with expectations that were not readily met in the host country.

The study also found that participants had to renegotiate their identity, language, and their conceptualization of voice in order to participate in American cultural systems. In their country of origin, for example, silence in formal academic institutions was valued and often rewarded. Upon arriving in the United States, they found an academic culture where voice was seen as a powerful vehicle through which knowledge was demonstrated. Therefore, because of the power of voice in the acquisition, construction, and demonstration of knowledge, they felt compelled to renegotiate the construct of voice in formal academic settings in order to meet expectations they had for personal and career development in the United States.

The study also found that participants navigated the epistemological positions of Women's Ways of Knowing and were not fixed in any one particular developmental phase. The findings suggest that the epistemological positions of Silent Knower, Received Knower, Subjective Knower, Procedural Knower, and Constructed Knower are not stages of epistemological development, but different positions that a woman occupies as she interacts with the various systems within the sociocultural environment. For the rest of this discussion, I will discuss how Caribbean women navigate each of the epistemological positions and how culture, individual agency, social capital, and the sociocultural environment influence the epistemological position that a woman occupies. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Navigating Women's Ways of Knowing

Anglophone Caribbean Women and Their Navigation Through The Epistemological Positions of Women's Ways of Knowing

The history of immigrant women's learning and development is the history of interactions between the self and the various sociocultural contexts within which she interacts. The sociocultural systems are embedded within the sociocultural environment and include the family, both in the United States and in the

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Caribbean; the community, both American and Caribbean; the institution, primarily the school and the workplace, and the society at large. The study revealed that each of these contexts influenced the women's learning and development experiences

Silent Knowers

This is the lowest position in the (1986) model, and the authors describe the women in this position as those who experience themselves as voiceless and mindless and who rely on external authority for their sense of self. As Belenky et al. (1986) note, "Although the silent women develop language, they do not cultivate their capacities for representational thought. They do not explore the power that words have for either expressing or developing thought (p. 25). What this study of Caribbean women demonstrates is that the notion of silence is not a universal phenomenon and that it has cultural interpretations. The silence that the women endured in American educational systems came primarily from their early socialization in an academic culture, where speech was not used as a demonstration of competence. Because of the power of the written word in the demonstration of competence in Caribbean schools, writing was the vehicle through which intellectual thought was demonstrated and through which hegemonic practices were critiqued and challenged. While English-speaking Caribbean women may choose a position of silence upon entering the American classroom, they are neither deaf nor dumb, but articulate and are often intellectually stimulating. Additionally, in West Indian cultures, silence in the present of authority figures is viewed as a sign of respect and not a vehicle through which to challenge the system. Triandis (1989) suggests that in collectivist cultures that stress interdependence and social connections rather than individualism, the rules of speech tend to be more tightly regulated by relationship and statuses. Because of the status ascribed to teachers during these women's early school experiences, the privilege of free voice was ascribed primarily to the teacher, and sanctioned voice to the student. Consequently, they learned to be silent in formal academic structures.

Received Knowers

According to Belenky et al., Received Knowers are those women who learn from listening to the voices of others and who have not found their voice to articulate their constructed knowledge. Again, this study found that while the women preferred to learn form authority, they were highly reflective and had the abilities to construct their own knowledge, which was often represented in their written work. Their preference for learning from the experts stems partly from their early school socialization, where experts handed down knowledge.

The participants grew up during an era when secondary education was reserved for the best and the brightest, and therefore, the selection process was very competitive. Because of the significance and competitive nature of secondary schooling, the elementary school structure was organized to maximize an objective pedagogy. Consequently, teachers were expected to impart factual knowledge and to prepare students to pass the high school common entrance exam. Because of the consequences of not mastering objective knowledge, few opportunities were available for the co-creation of knowledge in collaborative environments. Therefore, the women were socialized to be receivers of knowledge in formal academic structures. This position was rewarded with a secondary education or with the recognition of being a bright student. Goldberger (1996), in her reframing of the epistemological positions in her 1986 Women's Ways of Knowing note, "Receiving knowledge from external authority is not necessarily unreflective and automatic; at times one may choose to listen and receive knowledge from others" (p. 347). Caribbean women occupy the position of received knowers in structured learning environments, particularly when opportunities for career development are dependent upon academic credentials.

Subjective Knowers

According to Belenky et al., the women at this position place strong value on their intuition and their own internal truths. These women depend on gut feeling for the truth rather than on thought and articulated ideas. The Caribbean women in this study navigated to a position of subjective knowers, particularly when faced with the management of life's struggles. One of the many lessons learned as children stemmed from the intuitive wisdom of community members. These were lessons from the gut, and provided a tool kit for managing the struggles of living. Many of the participants emphasized that their early lessons on living,

taught by family and community members, as well as the objective knowledge acquired from formal educational structures prepared them for life in the host country. Collins (1990) emphasizes the importance of personal experience or wisdom as central to learning. According to Collins, one acquires knowledge through wisdom, which is the ability to negotiate the forces in one's life through intuition. Wisdom provides us with the knowledge to live and survive, despite oppressive forces.

Because Caribbean women must manage the struggles of life in a new nation, they often evoke their subjective knowledge for guidance in the management of their bicultural lives. Their intuitive knowledge is also shared with other group members in the spirit of community and social support. Even the members that Belenky and associates would classify as Silent Knowers in formal structures were found to be experts when it came to intuitive knowledge and wisdom. The older adults serve as keepers of the culture and pass on the cultural knowledge to the younger generation, as a way of preserving some of the Caribbean ways of knowing in their new country.

Procedural Knowers

These women are defined as those who are objective in their thinking and have a vested interest in formal educational structures. It is also a position from which techniques and procedures for acquiring, validating, and evaluating knowledge claims are developed and honored (Goldberger, 1996). According to Goldberger, these women had a separate and a connected way of knowing. Separate knowers challenge the knowledge that is being presented and take issue with it. Connected knowers, on the other hand, believe in the knowledge presented and incorporate the ideas into their own knowledge base. Clinchy (1996) refers to these two positions as the believers and the doubters. In listening to the voices of the Caribbean women as they reflected on their early and then later school experiences, there was a gradual shift from connected to separate knowing. Their early schooling in the Caribbean socialized them to be connected knowers. Because their form of learning was never to question the power of authority in either formal or informal settings, they grew up as connected knowers. However, upon arriving in the US, they were met with a culture where separate knowing was encouraged and viewed as a vital part of learning. Therefore, they remained silent in the US classrooms while other students challenged the teacher and the written word, discussed the issues, and articulated their constructed knowledge. They adopted the dualistic position of connected and silent knowers.

Being a silent and connected knower had its own rewards in the Anglophone Caribbean classroom. The students who sat quietly in class, absorbed the words of authority, and successfully reproduced these words at examination time were often classified as a bright students, and received additional attention from the teacher. This reward structure stifled the development of separate knowing in Caribbean educational structures. Over time, the participants have learned to become separate knowers, but this position is better demonstrated in their written work.

Constructed Knowers

Constructed Knowers have been defined to have an integrated sense of self and who are articulate and self-reflective. These women have reconstructed positive images of themselves and refuse to accept others' negative definition of them (Belenky et al., 1986). According to Goldberger (1996), "constructed knowing is the position at which truth is understood to be contextual; knowledge is recognized as tentative, not absolute; and it is understood that the knower is part of (constructs) the known. . . . constructed knowers value multiple approaches to knowing (subjective and objective, connected and separate) (p. 5).

Patterns of the women's growth and development clearly demonstrate characteristics of constructed knowing. Although they were first socialized within an objective epistemological orientation, they continue to grow in the value they place on their own ability to construct valid knowledge. This growth is facilitated in environments with social capital resource, where participants are made to feel welcome, and where the contexts of their race, gender, language, and ethnicity, do not create barriers to their development.

The participants were all asked to reflect on their lives over time and to talk about the changes that they saw relative to their learning and development. This study found that, with one exception, the higher the level of education, the more reflective the participant. All the participants with graduate degrees and two of the ones with undergraduate degrees were highly reflective as they articulated their developmental

changes over time. One participant, who is an administrative assistant on Wall Street, has a long history of professional experience with only 24 college credits, was found to be highly reflective. In reflecting on her epistemological development, Jackie enthusiastically noted,

> Oh my God, learning is life. That is my whole concept. To live and to breathe is to learn. Learning is walking down the street, where you can learn so many different things. Learning is everything that you do; it is everything that you are introduced to. The people you meet, all of that encompass learning, and that is what I am getting now. Before, it was all about passing the common entrance. Now it is about learning, and it is so pleasurable. . . . As I am learning, I growing as a person, and as I am growing, I am ever learning.

Jackie was the youngest participant at 35 years old, she had fewer college credits, and she was the only single parent in the group. Like many of the participants, she was found to be highly reflective, passionate about living and learning, and committed to a moral and ethical life, guided by a sense of spirituality. For most of the participants, spirituality played a central role in their development. What is not clear from this study is what promotes reflection in adulthood--is it academic achievement, professional experiences, life experiences, or a combination of all life experiences.

Conclusion

In Summary, what this study found is that the epistemological perspectives articulated in Women's Ways of Knowing are not stage-like developmental patterns but different positions within which women navigate in their epistemological development. Because of the flexibility in women's ways of knowing, a woman can evoke any of these positions, depending on the sociocultural context of the learning situation and the meaning she gives it. Then, based on her perception of self within the sociocultural environment and the level of social capital inherent in that environment, she evokes one of the five epistemological positions. Context, personal agency, and social capital, therefore, are the nuclei that drive women's learning and epistemological development. Most importantly, the study also fond that culture and early socialization in the country of origin influence a woman's response to interactional experiences within the sociocultural environmental systems, and therefore also influence the way of knowing that emerges as dominant.

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